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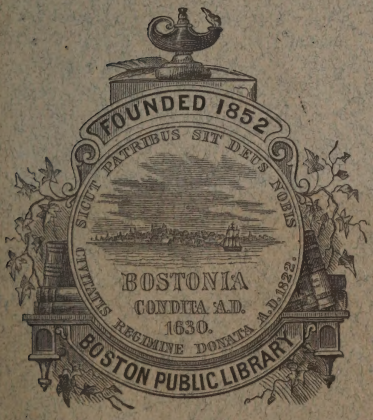

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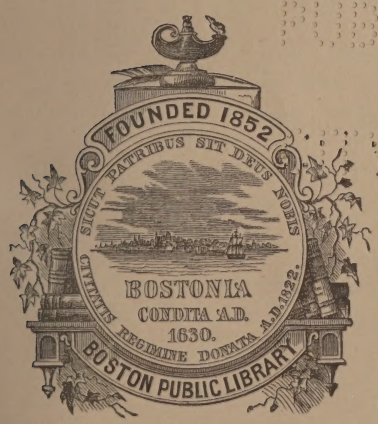

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PROCEEDINGS.

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

The dedication of the Jamaica Plain Branch of the Boston Public Library took place on the evening of Wednesday, December 5th, 1877, in Curtis Hall, immediately over the rooms occupied by the Library. Although the weather was stormy, a full audience was present, including a number of members of both branches of the City Council, as well as several of the Trustees of the Public Library.

The exercises of the occasion were opened by the Rev. James W. Thompson, D.D., of Jamaica Plain, who offered the following prayer: —

Almighty God, from whom all holy desires, and all good counsel, and all just works do proceed: we beseech Thee to inspire us with deepest thankfulness for all Thy benefits, and so to order all our doings by Thy wisdom, that no work undertaken for the improvement, elevation, and rational enjoyment of the people of this place may fail of its end; but that every such work may fully accomplish the purpose unto which it is directed. We heartily thank Thee for the various provisions that Thou hast made for the increase of knowledge and virtue amongst us; and especially at this time we would thank Thee for that generous institution in whose name and interests we are here gathered together. Thou hast graciously supplemented the public school with the public library, thus crowning the work of public education; and now that we are gathered together here to acknowledge Thy goodness in having provided and established a branch of this institution in this place, we desire Thy blessing and Thy smile to prevail whilst we join in dedicating it to its beneficent uses. We would dedicate it, O God, to the diffusion of knowledge; to the nurture of just principles, and exalting sentiments, and humane dispositions; to the developing of those broad sympathies and fellowships which communion with the best minds of the past and present, through their works, is suited to awaken and keep

alive; to a healthful literature, with its undefiled pleasures, and to all those influences which may be concentrated for the intellectual and moral development of the people of this community. And so dedicating it, O God, we beseech Thee to bestow Thy continual blessing upon it. Watch over its interests. Let it ever be a fountain of purity; let no unclean thing pollute it; and to this fountain, for long years to come, generation after generation, may the young and the old of all classes and conditions resort to partake of its life-giving waters. O God, we pray Thee to bless those who are to share in the further exercises of this occasion. May they be aided to speak their best thoughts in the best way for the edification and pleasure of those who are here. Bless Thy servant, the Mayor of this city, and all in official station, sharing the responsibility of the government with him. May they so administer the great trusts committed to them as that judgment and justice shall mark their action; and may their services be such as to promote the highest welfare of all the people. May Thy kingdom of peace, and joy, and righteousness speedily come, and Thy will be done upon earth as it is in heaven; and unto Thee will we give all glory and praise forever. AMEN.

The opening prayer was followed by singing by the SWEDISH QUARTETTE, whose performances, acceptably executed, were also interspersed between the other exercises of the occasion. The opening address of the evening was then delivered by His Honor FREDERICK O. PRINCE, Mayor of Boston, who said: —

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, — It gives me great pleasure to take part in these dedicatory exercises. The establishment of a library must be considered as an important event in any place, but I am sure that in a community so noted for its intelligence and culture as Jamaica Plain, the value of such an institution must be fully recognized and appreciated. We have many municipal institutions, which we cherish with pride, but there is none, if I rightly understand the popular feeling, which is regarded with higher favor than the Public Library. This disposition is shown in many ways, but especially in the cheerfulness with which our citizens submit to such taxation as its necessities and its interests require. Watching its progress from the beginning, I have observed that it has steadily made friends, until it has become so fixed in the affections of the people that it may now safely defy all opposition, whether attack be made by the sordid, the narrow-minded, or the

unlettered. I am not of the croakers who believe that Boston will cease to be urban; that her trade will decline, or her wealth diminish. Her prosperity rests on too solid foundations, and her men of business are too intelligent and active to permit any permanent disturbance or loss. But although every branch of business is at present depressed, and all property, in consequence, largely diminished in value, the devotion of our citizens to the cause of education and culture — conspicuous in every period of our annals — will not grudge every proper and reasonable requisition upon the treasury for the support of our school department, and its auxiliary, the Public Library. Our Library, through the ability of its managers and the liberality of its friends, is now the first in the country in respect to the number of its volumes; and is regarded by those most familiar with it, and best qualified to judge, inferior to none in regard to the usefulness and value of the books. I wish its accommodations were better, and that it was located in some place less exposed to the dangers of fire. If it were destroyed, there are portions of it which no money could replace. I trust it will not be long before our citizens will feel that the additional taxation required to erect a proper building for its safety and accommodation would not be a serious or unreasonable burden. The establishment of branch libraries is most wise, and makes a convenience for the people which cannot be overestimated. Books are not placed in libraries for ornament, but for use, and it is desirable for the accomplishment of the objects for which libraries are organized, that every facility and encouragement for using books should be afforded our citizens. It is most gratifying to know that so many of our books are read, and that the people of all classes read not only those which amuse and delight, but those which inform and instruct. The statistics in this respect show that the percentage of readers of what may be called *solid* books is very great, and steadily increasing. Boston has always claimed to be the most intelligent and cultivated city of America; and the claim is not unfounded. I venture the statement, that, in proportion to population, the number of books annually sold in this city, by those who buy to read, exceeds that of any other in the country.

If I were to enter into a panegyric of books, I fear that my remarks might seem to you trite and commonplace, as well as unnecessary. It would be "painting the lily and gilding refined gold." But I cannot withhold the observation, that when it is remembered what books are; what magic power they have to instruct and amuse; what resources they become to every class and condition in life; how they are, in the language of the Roman sage, the food of youth and the consolation of age; the delight of our homes, and our company at night, on our travels, and in our rural retreats, they may well be classed among our most

valued treasures. The first library of which history gives us any account was that formed by an Egyptian king. It was appropriately called the "Storehouse of Medicine for the Mind." How complete is the definition! Through books we come into communion with superior intellects everywhere. These talk to us and tell us what they think on those great questions of moral and natural science, of art, of literature, of government, of religion, of the world here and the world hereafter, which have occupied, and still occupy, thinking minds in every age and country. As has been well said, "God be thanked for books. They are the voices of the distant and the dead, and make us heirs of the spiritual life of past ages." What would be our emotions if now Plato, and Cicero, and Bacon, and Shakespeare, and others of the great writers should enter this room and converse with us! With what rapture we should greet them, unless the awe and reverence inspired by their presence should hold us amazed and mute. Should we not prize an hour's communion with them as the highest and most precious enjoyment of our lives, to be treasured among our most cherished recollections, among the things that are never to be forgotten? But we have them here, all the great masters of philosophy, science, art, and poetry, in their books. We have the divine portion of them. We have the minds of all those who, in every age, have instructed, inspired, and delighted the world since history commenced her record. Addison has well observed, "As the Supreme Being has expressed, and as it were printed, his ideas in the creation, men express their ideas in books."

What a privilege it is that we can sit in our libraries and converse with the great thinkers of every age, and hear them utter their grand thoughts! What a distinguished company may be found on the shelves of a library! How delightfully our leisure hours may be spent in such a presence! If we would drink of the well of philosophy, here are the sages of every school from Plato to Darwin. Would we roam in the fields of poetry, here are Homer, and Maro, and Horace, of the classic age, and Shakespeare, and Dante, and Shelley, and countless others of modern times. If we are in the vein for humor and wit, Cervantes, and Butler, and Thackeray will talk to us, and make us laugh to our heart's content. How much the world regrets the lost works of antiquity, those splendid compositions of Grecian and Roman genius, which we are told were once extant! What would we not give for the lost histories of Livy and Tacitus; the lost essays of Quintilian, and Pliny, and Varro; the lost dramas of Æschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles; the lost poems of Plautus and Ovid? We would rather have them than all the gold, and pearls, and precious stones which the dreaming Clarence saw scattered in the bottom of the sea.

It is wise to form the habit of reading for other purposes than that of

improving the mind. The student is lifted beyond the caprices and accidents of fortune. If we cultivate our capacity for thought, and develop our moral and intellectual faculties so that we delight in scientific inquiries, in artistic studies, in criticism, in the application of thought to the various fields of investigation, we shall have the means of happiness within our reach, whatever our lot in life. Such resources will make us superior to fortune, and enable us to bear the burden of any adversity. Dr. Channing, in his instructive essay on self-culture, has put this sentiment so well that I cannot refrain from quoting him. He says, "No matter how poor I am, no matter though the prosperous of my own time will not enter my obscure dwelling, if the sacred writers will enter and take up their abode under my roof; if Milton will cross my threshold to sing to me of paradise, and Shakespeare to open to me the worlds of imagination, and the workings of the human heart, and Franklin to enrich me with his practical wisdom, I shall not pine for want of intellectual companionship, and I may become a cultivated man, though excluded from what is called the best society in the place where I live." What a pleasure and solace the masters of fiction have been to the world! Is there any one here who does not feel indebted to Fielding, to Walter Scott, to Miss Austen, to Dickens, to Thackeray, and a host of others who might be mentioned, for happy hours spent over their glowing and fascinating pages? How much care they have soothed; how much sorrow they have consoled; how much despondency they have comforted! It is a subject of congratulation that books are within the reach of all. Formerly, their cost made them accessible to the few only, to the wealthy; but now their multiplication has brought them within the reach of all classes of society. At comparatively small cost we can have the works of all the great writers, — the poets, philosophers, historians, and scientists; and it is a consoling thought that, through the great invention of printing, books can nevermore be destroyed, as in ages past, by savage conquerors or fanatical bigots, so that their contents shall be lost to the world. Libraries may be pillaged and burned like those of Alexandria in ancient times, or those of the monasteries in the days of the Reformation, but the volumes can be replaced. In the language of the elegant English essayist, "They may last as long as the sun and moon, and perish only in the general wreck of nature."

Mayor Prince was followed by William W. Greenough, Esq., President of the Board of Trustees of the Public Library, who officially announced the opening of the new Branch, in these remarks: —

Mr. Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen, — In continuance of the enlightened policy, which had its first full development in the City of Boston only a quarter of a century ago, the City Government now establishes in West Roxbury, and more immediately in Jamaica Plain, a Library of such a popular and educational character as may be expected, with its annual additions, to meet the wants of the reading and thinking members of this community. It makes an humble beginning, as compared with other collections, not so easily accessible to the inhabitants, but with more works of interest and of general value than were contained in the great Central Library at the same period of its existence. The accommodations for visitors are suitable and commodious. The periodicals in its reading-room are such as have been found by experience to be among the most useful and attractive to both sexes. The books themselves have been selected upon the same general principles as have been found successful in the branches previously established. The Trustees now confide to your keeping and intelligent use a collection of modern as well as standard literature, to be more fully developed and enriched according to the necessities and demands of your readers, and the ability of the city to meet them.

There is one point, and that the most important, in connection with libraries, which may now be assumed as settled. A free people, with free schools, have a right to the next step in culture, the free library, which shall promote the elementary education which the experience of the civilized world has demonstrated as necessary to the continuance of free institutions. Libraries supply books, but do not supply understanding; that most important function is to be looked for in the reader. It can be furnished neither by schools nor by books. Both contribute the material, the moral discipline, and the knowledge, by which one generation may advance upon the results of previous experience. The learning of one age makes its mark on the common knowledge and sense of the next. Old Burton, of the "Anatomy of Melancholy," quaintly says, "Though there were many giants of old in physick and philosophy, yet I say with Didacus Stella, 'a dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant may see farther than a giant himself.'" Who Didacus Stella was, and where he obtained the foresight of that outlook, is dimly known to posterity. Whoever he was, he summed up the experience gained from previous intellectual work. What was his illustrative deduction from his own knowledge has become the logical, trusted, and practical result of the labors, sacrifices, and scientific search after truth of the generations which have gone before us. Our libraries are truly "rich with the spoils of time," and they present to the reader of to-day, even if he be a dwarf, the giant's shoulders.

There is no argument now to be made upon the benefits or importance

of free public lending libraries. On the one hand they are a sacred trust to the community on which they are bestowed. On the other hand, to accomplish proximately the result for which it was formed, the collection of books to be freely loaned must be suited to the intellectual, moral, and possibly imaginative wants of the clientelage which resorts to its shelves for their reading. No two average numbers of population in this country, as divided into districts, communities, parishes, towns, or cities, have the same education, pursuits, or moral tendencies, and each division requires different and often peculiar practical or imaginative literature to suffice for its contentment or progress. The rule in establishing the public library is to provide the largest number of books, in proportion to the scale of its endowment, that are useful to the largest number of people. Upon the experiment of the beginning in taste and knowledge is to be engrafted the growth which the dependent population shows to be needful as suited to its wants. Unfortunately, perhaps, there is no intellectual or moral barometer or aneroid which shall at any moment display to the eye the changes effected in the culture, morals, or growth of a community by access to good books, but the depression in the intellectual atmosphere is only shown in the obscure statistics of illiteracy and crime.

Illiteracy is the one condition which the public library cannot reach. People who cannot read obviously do not want books. The knowledge which they seek to acquire usually comes from the low experience of those with whom they are in sympathy, either natural or factitious, according to the needs of their daily life or to their conceived interests. All their knowledge, beyond that simply dependent upon their physical conditions, may be classed as second-hand. In this abnormal and unnatural form of subjective growth, this large and dangerous element of society naturally becomes the prey of false teachers in all social relations, and beyond that, in politics, morals, and religion. In this free country, receiving and tolerating the most ignorant and unworthy classes of emigrants, it is yet an open question whether the extended arms of welcome to all comers, respective only of common humanity, without any previous fitness for the blessings enjoyed, has not conduced more to the weakness than to the strength of our free institutions.

So the free library, with its other conditions of usefulness, is a missionary enterprise. While primarily established for the classes which by education and taste are enabled to make the appropriate use of the treasures freely bestowed for their happiness and improvement, there naturally comes a sympathy for and a desire to help those whose condition in life has excluded them from the power to make use of this great charity. To any individual who has reaped the benefit of free schools and free libraries, at the public expense, one may naturally turn

for sympathy and aid, because such gifts came to them spontaneously under the noble New England outgrowth. By our system every youth may receive the education which the city, town, or village can afford to give. But below and beyond this comes in the illiteracy for which the law can exercise no control or prevision. This is a far more serious evil than is popularly supposed. In the City of Boston the census of 1875 shows a population of 25,215 illiterates in a total of 341,919 inhabitants; of these 8,111 were males over 10 years of age, and 17,104 females, so that the city had 7 persons to every 100 who were mainly dependent upon the lowest grade of knowledge and morals for their facts and general intelligence. In this native-born precinct the percentage was less. In a population of 11,783, as furnished to me by the accomplished chief of the bureau of the statistics of labor, Mr. Carroll D. Wright, I learn that 611 illiterates existed at the time of the census, of whom 157 were males and 444 females. It is perhaps needless to say that this class was principally of foreign birth.

Why, then, should not the public library, enjoying the sympathy and help of the intelligent and thoughtful and reading classes, be the active force which should incite direct and systematic work for the proportion of inhabitants that cannot avail themselves of its educational advantages because of their inability, and yet, for this special cause, who need them the most? Why should not the young and helpful, as well as the mature in years, unite in some organization which should seek to reach every household where the letters of our common tongue can neither be read or written?

The misfortunes which our whole country has suffered from ignorance and its downward tendencies in the past summer teach us the lesson that every community is to a large degree responsible for its illiterate and dangerous classes.

It is proper to say something more to you in detail upon the composition of this Library, which differs from either of the branches yet constituted. The East Boston and South Boston branches had as a basis libraries already in existence, which were generously presented to the city. Those in Charlestown and Brighton were already full collections when they became branches by annexation. The library in Dorchester subsequent to its formation, was largely increased by the accession by gift of the Dorchester and Milton Circulating Library. In Roxbury, the branch established upon the Fellowes foundation, had the great assistance of the funds at the disposition of the Fellowes Trustees in the addition of a large number of volumes purchased annually, bearing the character of permanent value, — so that this collection, in proportion to the number of its volumes, is probably the best of the branches yet established. The branch recently opened at the South End has for its

basis a selected portion of about eight thousand volumes from the library of the Mercantile Library Association, the whole of which was presented to the city during the present year.

The West Roxbury Library, then, is the only one that stands substantially alone in its endowment. If found in the lapse of time to fulfil its mission, it will naturally attract the sympathy and benevolence of your citizens, who will seek to add to its usefulness by the gift of such costly works as are beyond the design of the city to contribute to its shelves. By the powers given to the Trustees, every donation and legacy to a branch will be sacredly administered for the purposes of the grant, and in conformity with the directions of the donor. It is naturally desired by the Trustees that this institution should become, as is the case with the other foundations of a similar character, not only an important element in the daily life of the reading public, but also, by the helpful sympathy of all classes, a source of local interest and pride. When it is remembered that more than one-third of the volumes in the Public Library have been added to it by private generosity, it will be seen how deeply the institution has impressed itself upon the public-spirited friends of general education, and how substantial has been the outgrowth of this sympathy. If this Library fulfils its appropriate functions here, may I not predict that it will find a similar recognition and aid from those who sympathize with its workings, and with the efforts of its managers to meet the general wants?

The arrangements for the personal relations of your inhabitants to this Library give the same extent of freedom of use as is already established in the parent institution. The same rules, regulations, and by-laws govern this branch that control the operations of the Central Library and the other branches. The management is vested in the same Board of Trustees, who are held responsible by the law for its "general care" and "control," and for "expenditure of all moneys appropriated therefor." The same provision which gives access to this collection gives the right also to borrow from the great Central Library books of larger intrinsic value and importance. Another duty, made incumbent upon the Trustees by ordinance, is one which will commend itself to every community to which the ministrations of the institution may be extended, that "in prescribing the regulations relative to the care and use of the books, it shall be the duty of the Trustees to adopt such measures as shall extend the benefits of the institution as widely as possible among the citizens and residents of Boston." Whether this portion of the trust has been faithfully executed, the statistics of the circulation and use of books is the only approximative evidence. Without fatiguing you with the aggregates of figures contained in the annual reports of the Trustees, it is perhaps sufficient to say that, with the remarkable

growth of the library and its branches, the circulation and use of books has increased from 81,281 in 1855, the first year when the Mason-street library was open during the whole year, to 1,140,000 in 1877. While the collection of books increased eleven-fold in these years, the circulation advanced to nearly fifteen-fold. This ratio, however, can hardly be sustained in the future.

The most earnest and zealous patrons of the library are the young and immature. May I be permitted to utter a few words of caution upon the uses which they may make of books? It is an anxiety naturally felt by every promoter of free libraries, that the right book should go into the right hands; but this is a result entirely beyond general control. Books are provided for the use of all classes, which are also free to the immature no less than to the adults. If the library fails to exert its proper influence upon the young, whose tastes and characters are in process of formation, it will fail in consequence of injudicious selection of reading by the classes who are incompetent to judge for themselves as to what is most suitable for their condition.

Various remedies have been suggested for this difficulty. Both child and adult will select for amusement or instruction such works as they prefer, and oftentimes these are not the books which they obviously require. To meet this question practically there is but one solution. The librarian may be competent to assist and advise what books may in general be read with advantage upon the subjects in which the young are interested; but the librarian has not the personal knowledge which will enable him to guide the child to the selection which may be best suited to its culture or character. A recent suggestion threw this duty upon the school-teacher; but he has no power of control. No influence can be substituted for that of the parent, or guardian, to whose oversight the formation of character and the education are entrusted. No greater mischief can ensue to the child than the reading of works unsuitable or dangerous to its moral nature or intellectual growth. It may be said that few parents have the knowledge requisite to give the proper and sympathetic direction to the reading of youth. This, to a large extent, is true. But it is also evident that parents with such knowledge as they should possess of the tendencies of their children in early youth, can always obtain the requisite information from the librarian, or the teacher, or from any member of the educated professions with whom they have relations.

The responsibility of those who have charge of the reading of youth in this great reading country cannot be overrated. There is no excuse for any neglect. In providing the free library its contents must be so varied that, except on the point of immorality, it must embrace such books as are suited and useful, so far as may be known, to the various

characters and interests which make up the community. The physical diet must be suited to the constitution which is dependent upon it for its nutriment and growth. In the earlier years of existence no parent will permit the child to elect what food will be most agreeable to its palate without reference to the health of the body. If this is true in the daily experience of the natural growth of the physical frame, how much more important the selection of appropriate and nourishing diet for the intellect and the understanding! Nothing is more hurtful than promiscuous reading, in early years, of sensational and unreal and improbable representations of life, and yet such books are often most attractive to the crudity and inexperience of youth. The importance of this oversight by parents cannot be too strongly enforced. If they have no time to personally inspect the quality of the books selected by their children for perusal, or if they feel incompetent to judge for themselves, the families are few in numbers who have not at hand the remedy, either at the hand of their clergyman, a reading friend, or the librarian of the collection from which the books are drawn, who, if not having time to read the work, can easily learn the reputation of the author by inquiring, in the present instance, at the central library.

I regret, my friends, that for your entertainment my remarks on this occasion have most necessarily taken a practical form. It is my duty to tell you what the city offers you in the formation of this new collection of books, — what its purposes are, and what your relations to it may become. Of what books are, and their value to you and to all, others will speak to you.

The auspices, then, under which this Library begins, are apparently most favorable to success. Your population is homogeneous, and is deservedly well known for its general intelligence and culture. Established from the public funds, at the request of your citizens, the institution may become an important factor in the daily lives of your inhabitants. Its basis is freedom, — the freedom of use, and not of abuse or neglect. Such as it is, it is now committed by the City Government and the Trustees to the fostering care and to the intelligent coöperation of all those to whom its establishment is welcome.

Mr. Greenough was followed by the Rev. James Freeman Clarke, D.D., who said: —

Mr. Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen, — It is a great pleasure to me, fellow-citizens, that we meet together to-night to accept from the city this branch of the Public Library. I am glad that that noble tree on Boylston street has consented to extend one of its branches in this direction.

Public schools, it has been well said, are unfinished and incomplete unless, in addition to the free school, there is free reading. We teach the children to read, and then we must give them something good to read. If they do not have something good to read then they will certainly have something bad to read, and we can only displace the bad reading by giving them good reading. I suppose we are well aware that there is enough bad reading provided for the young people. I am sorry to say there are quantities of boys' newspapers which are poured out every week, which are, perhaps, just about as bad reading as boys could have; which show them life under the most impossible phases and conditions. They tell stories which amount to something like this: If a boy will only be disobedient to his parents, and will commit himself to the current of a great city like New York, he will presently meet, perhaps in the street-car, a lovely young lady, whom he may favor in some way, possibly by giving her a car-ticket, and she will hand him a visiting-card; she will prove to be the daughter of a millionaire, who will take this boy into his counting-room, and by his business energy and hard industry the boy will save the old gentleman from bankruptcy, and be rewarded by the hand of this lovely young woman. I think we should provide something a little more sensible for boys than that.

We want good reading, and to have good reading we must, in the first place, have interesting reading. It will not do to give boys, or young people, or other people who do not care so much about reading, works of too high an order, at least to begin with. We cannot present them with treatises on metaphysics with much hope of interesting them, and even the works of Darwin and Plato will not suit boys at first. They must have stories; but let them have good stories. They must read romances and novels; but let them have good romances and good novels, — those that will elevate their minds. There is plenty of reading of that kind, which is also interesting reading.

It is an old story, that when Solon was asked if he had given Athens the best laws, he replied "No; but the best laws they were able to accept." We must give the young people the best books they are ready for, and these books will be sure to lead them up to something higher.

I was, not long ago, gratified to hear from some distinguished publishers in Boston, that the class of books they printed and sold became every year more elevated, — better books and higher books; that every year they met with a larger sale for better books. If we begin reading a newspaper we soon shall want something better than a newspaper. I think, myself, that most boys and girls are quite capable of enjoying such books as Walter Scott and Shakespeare; and I am inclined to think that if we who are here to-night were asked about our knowledge of history, we should be obliged to admit that the best knowledge

we have of history was derived from Shakespeare and Walter Scott. The fact is that the old-fashioned histories which were given to us in our young days were not readable. A boy might dig through them, but he would not remember anything of them. We have better histories now: those of Motley and Prescott, Carlyle's French Revolution, and other histories of the same kind, which are really as interesting as the most interesting story; and our young people are to be congratulated, I think, that they can now have books which are not only useful, but also interesting.

I recollect very well — if you will pardon the garrulity of an elderly man — that when I was a boy, I found in my grandfather's library, which was a theological library, and not very attractive to me, an imperfect copy of Shakespeare. I was told afterwards that the book came ashore with a man-of-war which was wrecked on Cape Cod, before the Revolution. I took these books, and in the summer time I used to go out into the field to a snug retreat among the limbs of a chestnut-tree, and there I read my Shakespeare, hour by hour. It was incomplete, and I could not tell how many more volumes there might not be. The works of Shakespeare extended themselves indefinitely in my imagination.

I therefore not only had the pleasure of enjoying Hamlet, the Tempest, and other plays, but also the expectation of enjoying a miraculous Shakespeare, whose works might continue without end.

You know the schools then had holidays on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. One afternoon, instead of playing on the Common, I read Scott's poem of Marmion, all the afternoon, and when evening drew on, and I approached the end of my book, I was astonished to meet these lines, which seemed to be addressed to myself personally, by the author, — in the L'Envoy, at the close of the poem: —

> To thee, dear schoolboy, whom my lay
> Has cheated of thine hour of play,
> Light task, and pleasant holiday.

I thought certainly Walter Scott was a prophet, and knew I was going to read that book on Saturday afternoon.

Books must be interesting in order to be good reading, and I am glad to see that the principle on which this Public Library of Boston is conducted is entirely opposed to the old-fashioned principle of the old-fashioned library, which was arranged with the apparent notion that the library is a kind of jail, in which books are to be locked up and kept safe and sound, and not to be allowed to come out if they can possibly be kept in; and that the librarian of the library is a kind

of jailor who should feel that he is violating some kind of law if he allows books to go out. The Public Library of Boston is conducted on entirely the opposite principle. The principle now is to welcome everybody and encourage them to read the books. The Trustees have adopted the principle that if a single student will promise to read a book which is not in the Library, they will buy that book, provided it be not too expensive. They rejoice in taking every possible means to encourage everybody to read.

That is the principle, and it can be traced back to the efforts of one of the first friends of the Public Library, Mr. George Ticknor. In my youth Mr. Ticknor's library was free to everybody. It was almost the only one where a great many interesting books could be found, and Mr. Ticknor was very glad to let anybody have a book from his library, on the simple condition that the person taking a book would write his name in a large book kept for that purpose, and he scarcely ever lost a book from his library.

Books, to be interesting, must also be instructive. We want books to be instructive, and the best instruction, as we know, can be obtained from works of biography, travel, and science. But, as has been well said by the President of the Board of Trustees, we also want some guidance and instruction in selecting these books. There are all kinds of books of history and travel. I took a book the other day which attracted me by its title. It was an account of travels in Thibet. I thought nobody could travel in that country without making an interesting book; and, moreover, the title was attractive, — it was called "The Roof of the World." If you will believe me, the author had been through that region, of which very few people know anything, and had filled the volume with matter which nobody could read with any interest. Why was it? This writer was an Englishman, and had a tendency to criticise everything that wasn't English. On the contrary, Father Huc travelled through Thibet, and contributed something as interesting as anybody could desire. And why? Father Huc sympathized with the people among whom he was. He took a great fancy to them, and a great interest in the Buddhist religion, and, consequently, his work was very interesting.

Therefore, readers want a little instruction in regard to what books to read, and the catalogues of our Public Library have been arranged with a good deal of pains to give them that advice. In these catalogues you will find most valuable instruction in selecting books, and this makes them extremely valuable. I will not stop to say anything more of the character of the books we are to read. We want books, of course, that will make us nobler and better; but, thank God, all great books do that. The book that has not a good spirit in it will inevitably

be banished from the face of the earth, while the books that last — the great books of the world — carry us up to a higher plane. They give us good motive and impulse always.

I happen to have in my possession, Mr. Mayor and Mr. President, a letter written to my grandfather by Mr. George Ticknor, when he was a boy only sixteen years of age, and the object of the letter was to thank Dr. Freeman for the present of a copy of Don Quixote in Spanish. Mr. Ticknor said, "He was very much indebted for that book, because it was a rare one" [it was a rare book, I suppose, in those days], "and one which would enable the reader, if he perused it with diligence, to acquire some little knowledge of the Spanish language." I should not wonder if that little book had been the means of putting George Ticknor in the direction of those studies which afterwards made him the most accomplished scholar in Spanish literature in the world. It shows what one book can do. It was one of the great books of literature, and it gave a great impulse to the mind of that young man. Therefore, I join in what has been said by the Mayor, and thank God for good books.

I sympathize entirely with what Charles Lamb says in his essay on "Grace Before Meat." He says that whilst high and low thank God for their dinners, we ought also to thank him for a great many other things; and then he adds, "I feel that when I sit down to one of the books which I enjoy so much, and which have comforted my soul so much, I ought to ask a blessing upon it before I begin to read it."

We are asking a blessing to-night upon these books which have been brought to Jamaica Plain. We are here to thank God for them. We are here to ask a blessing upon them, that they may tend to elevate us, benefit us all, and make us all better men and women; as they certainly will if we use them aright.

I will just quote, in conclusion, the words of one of our fellow-citizens of Boston, who has a right to be heard in any Boston meeting, our Boston poet, — eminently our Boston poet, — Oliver Wendell Holmes, who, in speaking of that which time destroys, and of that which time is unable to destroy, thus speaks of the immortality of all good words: —

> One thrill of earth dissolves a century's toil,
> Strewed, like the leaves which wither on the soil.
> But one low tone, scarce whispered to the air,
> From shore to shore the blasts of ages bear.

The Greek Republics die, but Homer lives forever, the teacher of our children to-day. The Roman empire falls, but Horace and Virgil delight us always. The Jews are scattered over the earth, but the

words of their prophets inspire and guide us to God and to virtue evermore.

The next address was by the Hon. B. F. Thomas, one of the Board of Trustees of the Public Library, who spoke as follows : —

Mr. Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen, — It cannot be necessary for me to say that for all broad and liberal culture a large and well-chosen library is indispensable. The city has recognized that trust by her munificence in planting and watering the parent institution and this important branch, and by the presence to-night of her accomplished chief magistrate. The Trustees, however, wish it to be understood that no action of the city or of the Trustees will preclude the counsels, the hearty coöperation or *material aid* from the wealth, culture, and liberality of this beautiful portion of the city. Its privileges in that regard will be sacredly preserved.

Books are the chief instruments of culture in adult life. The school, the college, have done well if they have taught us how to learn, have trained and disciplined the mind for the life-work of culture and have given us some general idea of the geography and the limits of the field of knowledge. The pulpit, the stage, the public meeting, conversation, the newspaper, are helps indeed, but the great means of culture in mature life are books, — the library. I do not undervalue the training, the education which men get in the school of active life and business. The conflicts, the struggles, the trials, the disappointments and the failures on this arena, are stern and rugged but faithful teachers. All of us have seen able and wise men bred in this school only; but wiser, larger, better men they would have been if they had added to this training the grace, refinement, breadth, expansion which come from daily converse with books in which are garnered up the beauty and wisdom, the hopes and aspirations and the cries out of the depths of the soul, *suspiria de profundis*, of all ages and of all climes.

But it was not of the library as the instrument of education in mature life, of its convenience, of its necessity even for human culture and progress, that I meant to say a word to-night, but of the library as a recreation, a consolation, a joy. The simplest statement is the best. Books are companions, are society. We go a great way to see a great man, sometimes a little one; but in the library the great men of all time are by our side; in the moment of their best thought and happiest expression, of their most sparkling wit and jolliest humor. For every mood of mind and heart there is companionship. In the quiet of your

own fireside, all knowledge is your province. You sit at the feet of the great masters and teachers of the race. They come and go at your bidding. They never get weary, they never scold or sneer at your dulness. If you do not understand them they say gently, "Come and try again; we are always at your service." If they judge and rebuke you, as they will, the tear of penitence, the blush of shame, is between you and them. Sitting at the confessional of the heart they reveal its shortcomings only to yourself. The secrets of earth, air, and ocean are laid open to the loving and patient eye. They penetrate with you the infinite realms of space to teach you the divine mechanism. They unravel the mysteries of your being that you may the better know and reverence yourself, the better see, in spite of all his weaknesses, "what a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god." I make no pretensions to scholarship nor to a wide range of study; but the society and companionship of books have been to me the great joy and solace of life, "more precious than rubies, and the gain thereof than fine gold." In their blessed company not one hour of life has hung heavy on my hands.

Such was the testimony of the most accomplished statesman and orator of antiquity: "Hæc studia adolescentiam agunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis perfugium ac solatium præbent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur."

Such that of one whose life was given to books, the most omnivorous reader of his time, the author of that charming book, "The Doctor:"—

My days among the dead are past;
Around me I behold
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
The mighty minds of old.
My never-failing friends are they,
With whom I converse day by day.

With them I take delight in weal,
And seek relief in woe;
And while I understand and feel
How much to them I owe,
My cheeks have often been bedew'd
With tears of thoughtful gratitude.

The Rev. Joseph B. Clark, of Jamaica Plain, who was the next speaker, said: —

Mr. Mayor, and Ladies and Gentlemen, — If Solomon were to revise his Ecclesiastes, there is one sentence he would not touch, unless,

indeed, to print it in emphatic italics: "*Of making many books there is no end.*" But if Solomon were the wise man he is reputed to have been, he might add a foot-note to this passage; and such a note might contain this double caution: "Beware, amid this multitude of books, what you read, and how you read it!"

It is not a welcome duty, sir, in the face of a great public benefit, even to hint that so undoubted a privilege as a public library may be exposed to some abuse. Certainly, the City of Boston will not be responsible therefor. We cheerfully assume that our city, in the person of those skilled and eminent gentlemen who have this duty in charge, has selected with wise and careful thought the volumes now offered for public use. But what city, by any measure of care or discretion, can endow the patrons of her libraries with wisdom in their use? Manifestly, this is a question for the individual reader, and not for the government, how to choose from this bountiful store the reading suited to his age and taste and deeper need; and, in my judgment, no more vital question, among the many that belong to the hour, can be raised.

Let us suppose the case a little changed from what it is. Suppose the city to erect a building in the heart of the community, and to inscribe on its front the word "Free." It then sends into all our homes an earnest invitation to us and our children to come and make a welcome use of its privileges. What are these privileges? This building is divided into many chambers, and in each one lives a man or woman with a certain character, and fixed opinions, and, above all, with a peculiar power of impressing his character and opinions on other minds. Some of these tenants are grave, very grave; some are gay, very gay; some are centuries old, and correspondingly antique in mental style; others are young, and up to the latest notion of the times.

The privilege to which we are invited is to knock at any one of these many doors, to take under our arm the hand of any one of these many friends, and to make him the companion of our most leisurely and solitary hours. We take him to our homes; we admit him to our best rooms. He talks with us in the evening hour, and we listen with every sense absorbed. Perhaps he sits by our pillow until his whispered words mingle with and color our dreams. With the first waking moment the spell is renewed. In hours of the day when duties most press, the thought of our friend and of his words will intrude. We are drawn away from the desk where we write, from the lesson we study, by visions of our waiting teacher at home; and when the hour of release comes round, how surely we are back again at his side! We talk to one another of what he says to us. We commend him to our friends. We part company with him, at last, only to draw another and another. We shall remember their words to the end. Their thoughts and opinions

begin already to inspire our action. They are become a part of us, and whatever shall be the stamp of our mind and heart we must owe not a little to these free companions and friends.

Suppose, sir, this were the case before us to-night. Is there a father who would not watch with concern what use his sons and daughters made of this peculiar privilege? Is there a youth with reasonable forethought who would not be concerned for himself? Viewed under this figure, the use of a public library becomes to every citizen a most responsible privilege, the more so that my poor figure fails chiefly in this, that the bad power of an ill-suited book is greater than that of an ill-mated friend, by as much as the communion of books is always more subtle, continuous, and intimate than that of the living person.

What, then, should I draw from a free public library for the culture and recreation of my mind? Fiction? Most certainly. It is a hardy man who would venture, after Mr. Curtis' splendid eulogy of Charles Dickens, to question the value of fiction, either as the teacher or entertainer of the mind. I am not the one who would dare or wish to do it. Dame Partington had better chances against the Atlantic with her broom than he would have who should set himself against the popular taste for this class of reading. The true question is not, as some have put it, "Shall we read novels?" That is a foregone conclusion. We shall read them, and while the world stands the people will continue to read them. The true questions are these: What novels shall we read, and what proportion of our reading shall be of this order?

The field to choose from is certainly a crowded one. Our presses run over and fairly ooze with novels and novelettes. Of seven-tenths of them all I do not hesitate to say we can be wisely and proudly ignorant. They do not serve even as a mild relaxation. They are simply inane and drivelling. It is too high praise to say of them that they teach wrong. They teach nothing. They leave nothing behind but a flat taste in the mouth, corrupting our relish for things better. Putting these all aside there are novels which survive. There is fiction for children which must be reprinted as often as the spelling-book. There are society novels which belong to every generation, so keenly and truly have they interpreted human nature. There are novels of character and of incident which have passed every test of literature, especially the crowning test of time, and they survive; and because they survive they are fittest to survive, and because they are fittest to live they are fittest to be read and studied. I should charge myself with no wrong to a child of mine if I were to sum up the great writers of fiction on these ten fingers, and offer him no others. He would have to live in awful ignorance of "That Husband of Mine," and of "My Mother-in-Law,"

and all of that class. But I am so old-fashioned as to believe that he would suffer nothing from the lack of their acquaintance.

What proportion of fiction to read is an easier question, even, than what kind, if we are to treat the mind as considerately as we do the body. We acknowledge the wisdom of feeding our bodies with a healthful variety. Sugar is good, but we do not live on sugar. Pickles are a pleasant and healthful spice on the dinner-table. But we do not make a dinner of pickles. And I need not affront the common-sense of this audience by more than suggesting that a continuous diet of poetry, science, philosophy, or fiction, cannot be a healthful and symmetrical regimen for the mind.

There are two other classes of reading brought within reach by a public library, for which I earnestly hope there may be an increasing demand: First, popular works in science, especially the science of familiar things. Is it not due, sir, to the earth on which we live, that we should know the common facts about its history and structure? Can we innocently breathe the balm of trees, or inhale the fragrance of flowers, and be ignorant of the laws by which they grow? Dare we call ourselves good neighbors to the brutes and birds, and be uninformed of their habits? The very clouds are a reproach to us, if we cannot tell whence they come and whither they go. Fire, air, water, magnetic currents, are the trained servants of the age. Are we content to enrich ourselves with their service, and remain willingly ignorant of their nature? Such ignorance is not honorable when books on familiar science have so multiplied that every boy and girl may be their own philosopher. I met, last summer, a little maid of twelve, who could discourse intelligently of every bug and butterfly she saw. Unquestionably her natural tastes were peculiar, but all her information had been derived from the public library of the town where she lived.

The other class of books are those which illustrate the different trades and callings. The public library is the workingman's best friend, if he but knew it. It is a great hour in any man's life when he becomes aware that to his trade there is a philosophy, — to his calling a literature; and the wise workman, who goes back of his bench and his tools to make himself familiar with the history of his vocation, and with the principles from which it springs, does more for himself than he dreams. He has relieved his life of much of its drudgery. He has made his calling nobler, his promotion swifter. The community soon becomes his debtor for more skilful toil, and the public are not slow to pay the debt.

I rejoice, sir, in the benefits awaiting this community from the opening of this public privilege. There are at least two classes of citizens who ought to be glad: those who, by the accident of birth, have been

deprived of the blessing of schools, and those who, having had the chance of learning, squandered it. The public library comes to the rescue of both. It is not too late to redeem the past, however it was lost. History is full of names of men, leaders and benefactors of society, who never knew the blessing of schools, but graduated from the public library alone. Arkwright learned mechanics in a barber's shop; Huntington rose from the grime of a coal-heaver to the pulpit; Dodsley was a footman, and Holcroft a groom. Baffin and Bowditch, the navigators, never had a full year's schooling; the one worked out his problems as a cabin-boy, and the other as a ship-chandler's clerk. Hugh Miller taught himself geology as a day-laborer in the quarry. Elihu Burritt mastered eighteen languages in the odd moments of blacksmithing; and Abraham Lincoln was studying for the Presidency as he lay stretched out before the flickering blaze of the wood-cutter's camp, with the "History of All Nations" in his hands. And we shall deserve to be called mental cowards, if, with these splendid avenues of knowledge opening at our feet, we do not profit by the example of such men.

The exercises were closed by the singing of the hymn "My country, 'tis of thee," by the Swedish Quartette, and a benediction by the Rev. D. H. Taylor.

A short time was then employed by the audience in an examination of the library-rooms. The premises which they occupy were previously used as a ward-room for the Jamaica Plain District; and the arrangements for their adaptation to library purposes are as follows: At the rear of the room are the book-shelves and the librarian's desk; across, and immediately before the shelves, is a counter, with the desks for the attendants and the reference-books; at right angles to this counter runs a stout rail, dividing the front part of the room into two parts, one of which is to be used as a reading-room, and the other for the book delivery. The branch begins its operations with a collection of about five thousand volumes, and is under the charge of Mrs. Eliza R. Davis and Miss Annie Barton.